
Title: Against the Orcs

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Cove. A filthy port by
all accounts, and this
tavern seemed to be
more dirty than most by
an order of magnitude.
A sickly crud dripped
from between the planks
of the roof, onto the
oft-gouged half-rotted
wood table I sat at, my
books open under a
lantern as I scribed the
tales of yet another
prose-poet bard with no
sense of rhythm or
literary artifice.

Across the way, a
cantankerous and
ulcer-ridden old sea dog
of a man pounded his
copper mug of ale into
the slimy table, sending
up an eruption of froth
that settled into the
wood.

“Half orc, she was!
Hah! But I still had
something to give ta her!
More cushion for the
pushin’ indeed, mates!
Can’t say that I minded
all that much ‘till I had
ta go an’ get an An Nox
for the pox on me...”

I wanted to step in with
a word on the vicious
nature of the parentage
of half orcs when the
door burst open, cutting
off the punchline, and my
exposition, as a gust of
hot, wet wind blew in
from outside. The night
immediately covered the
place, as the wind blew

out the dripping, sizzling
candles that were all
about, and had provided
an oily illumination.

I secured my feathered
cap upon my head, as it
allows me to see in total
darkness. Panic had
gripped the room. I
heard a clamorous
concussion as the
bedraggled sea dog turned
over his table and hid
behind it. A tavern maid
with a gap between her
teeth and scars of old
pox between her breasts
shrieked in the darkness.

The man was dripping wet
from the rain, but a
sinister stream of liquid
ran from his pants leg;
blood, freshly wetting and
profuse. It ebbed and
pulsed onto the floor as
the man attempted to
gather himself.

“Orcs...” Then his
breath exploded, not out
of his mouth, but from a
sudden hole in his neck
as an arrow burst out
from his throat! Blood
sprayed the tavern and in
the half-darkness I could
hear the screams of the
tavern-goers as they ran
for the back exit,
trampling one another into
the ichor of the mud
floor.

Picking up a butchers’
knife from the table, I
ran forward and shoved
the tavern wench out of
my way, then grabbed her
serving platter to use as
a makeshift shield.
Crashing through the
wretched man dying in
the door, I saw the orc
turn and fire a single
shot.

Instinctively, I threw up the serving platter, which stopped the jagged bolt mere inches from my face. I kept running as the beast rounded the moulded, mildew-infested stone chimney of a local farmer. Everything was still, for a moment, all I could hear was the rising rabble of the local guards, and a few panicked chickens.

I hauled towards the chickens at a cautious pace, and before I rounded the corner, I threw one around the way.

There was a squawk and a puff of feathers and I knew I would be buying some tobacco-soaked half-drunk farmer a new chicken. I then made the corner, and ran hard into the orc scout. He was wearing pitiful armor that did not protect his underarms.

I drew the blade quickly underneath one shoulder, then the other, before gouging the knife across his pectorals, preventing him from using the bow again.

The orc fled, a behavior I had never before seen in orcs - unless a dragon was chasing them. I was no dragon, but I sprinted towards him when I heard him utter guttural orcish-tinged versions of arcane syllables - *rel por!*

He was teleported thirty or so feet away, to the top of a roof. It did not hold. The slimy, mold-encrusted straw gave way and he fell right

through.

I ran around to the front of the stone and wood shack, eaten through with termites. The door swung open and a screaming, naked hairy man came running out.

I jumped in. A lantern had spilled a burning oil onto the mud floor and a shattered, stinking table was catching flame. Amongst them, there was the orc scout, pulling tight a bandage with his teeth, sealing the seeping wounds that I had delivered with a clever over-and-under wrap.

Never before had I known orcs to retreat, bandage themselves, or use any sort of clever tactical maneuver. That conceit was going right out of the window, however.

The orc likely would have followed the conceit, but there were no windows. I stepped forward and stabbed a few times as the poor fiend attempted to run away, right into the back.

It fell, dead on the ground, clutching an odd bow. I picked it up, examined the insidious arrowhead. The bow was made for a strong man, no doubt, but I could handle it, no problem. I drew it back, the craftsmanship was quite nice for an orcish weapon.

I felt odd. Confused, dazed - a magical effect. Then my limbs wanted to be paralyzed, magic soaked through my being,

but years spent being a
test subject for mages
who shared my madness
for knowledge have left
me half immune to all
but the most powerful of
magics.

An orc mage! In the
street! I drew the
arrow back and released
it, it slung forward and
embedded deep into the
shoulder.

I drew, launched another
arrow, and this one found
a better target - the
heart of the mage. The
glowing body fell down
onto the ground,
self-incinerating in a
matter of seconds.

By now, a few guardsmen
had shown up, in time to
catch me bandaging a
minor wound I had
suffered, and casting an
'an nox' in case I'd
caught anything from
touching the orcs or the
townsfolk.

I headed for the decrepit
tower that housed the
town guard.

"Well, you see, Mr...
Granth." The guard
captain sighed. He was
standing in front of a
reeking peat fire that
gave off a smoke which
was acrid, bitter, and
smelled like burning flesh.

"...we're under attack
by pirates. We do get a
few orcs, yes, from the
fort in the west. They
cannot attack us en
masse, nor can we do the
same, except by sea, due
to the narrow passageway
between the cliffs and
the sea. Therefore, we

deal with the pirates, Mr. Granth. If you've got a ship, I could loan you the money to hire a few adventurers, and I'd let you get my best guardsman on the case. I'll admit, they've never used archers or mages here in town."

I was ready. As a man who knew the ins and outs of orcish culture, I knew that this was the beginning of an orcish blood war. Someone had wronged an orc lord. This was no raid, no mere assassination or incursion.

War would come, alright. And I hated to bring it to the orcs. The reason that I could understand their plight was because I had lived amongst them, heard their tales, fought elves and men and murdered my own kind.

It made me all the more ready to fight.

I had a boat. The fastest boat in Britannia.

The Codex Mathematica.
TO BE CONTINUED